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C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 000161

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [OIIP](#) [OEXC](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQ IS ABOUT OIL, THAI ISLAMIC OFFICIAL TELLS NORTHERN
MUSLIM LEADERS

CLASSIFIED BY: Beatrice Camp , Consul General, Consulate Chiang
Mai, State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Thailand's highest ranking Islamic official told northern Muslim leaders at a recent gathering that the U.S. invaded "Iraq because of oil; Iran is because of oil." In his remarks, the 91-year old Chularajamontri also praised the royal family, criticized the Pope and blamed the Jews. End summary

¶2. (U) Muslim leaders gathered in Chiang Mai Sept. 16-17 for an annual seminar, with the Consul General and Consulate political specialist invited for the opening ceremony presided over by Sawat Sumalayasak, appointed to the position of Chularajamontri, or State Counselor for Thai Islamic affairs, six years ago by the King. The invitation to the U.S. Government representatives was a sign of the long-standing good relations between the Consulate and the Chiang Mai Provincial Islamic Council (PIC), most recently strengthened by a Public Affairs-sponsored Islamic speaker program and post's nomination of an Imam from Mae Sariang for the International Visitor Program.

¶3. (U) According to former Chiang Mai PIC chairman Imam Mustafa Hassan, the 87 attendees included executive committee members from the Provincial Islamic Committees of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Tak, the three northern provinces with large enough Muslim populations to support such committees, as well as representatives from mosques from most of the 17 northern provinces. Similar seminars are held annually in all regions. Intended to strengthen the relationship between the government sector and the country's Muslim community, these seminars are funded by the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Culture's Department of Religion Affairs.

¶4. (C) In his Sept. 16 remarks opening the seminar, the Chularajamontri, who is regarded as the spiritual leader of all Thai Muslims and chief functionary of the Islamic religious system in Thailand, discussed Islamic principles and political aspects of global development. He began by praising the royal family's dedication to duty in the goal of national unity as a model for Muslims to emulate. The Chularajamontri described himself as saddened by the Pope's recent remarks linking Islam with violence, noting that the remarks could easily lead to further misunderstanding between religious communities that are already in conflict. He continued by stating that the U.S. invasion of Iraq and "imminent invasion" of Iran are "because of oil", adding "excuse me" in an apparent nod to the presence of the Consul General. He blamed the U.S. actions on Jews and concluded that Islam is the religion that can guarantee peace.

¶5. (SBU) Before becoming Thailand's national Islamic spiritual leader in 2000, Chularajamontri Sawat was a teacher at Bangkok's Islamic College in Bangkok and a politician at both municipal and national levels, serving as a Bangkok MP with the Democrat Party in the 1970s. Appointed by the King for life, Sawat is

not universally popular throughout Thailand's Muslim community, especially in the south. In recent months, a group in Bangkok has demanded his resignation on the grounds of irregularities in halal administration. Pramarn Mooktaree, Chiang Mai PIC representative on the national Central Islamic Committee (CIC), dismissed the charges as personal attacks trumped up by losing candidates in the CIC election. Some Internet bloggers claimed the campaign to remove him was being engineered by the Thai Rak Thai party, at least partly because of Sawat's Democrat Party affiliation.

¶6. (C) Comment: The Chularajamontri delivered his anti-U.S., anti-Semitic comments in a gentle, non-strident way; the audience, almost exclusively men wearing yellow shirts signifying loyalty to the King, listened in the same polite manner. Following the ceremony he chatted briefly with the VIPs, including Thai government officials and the Consul General, before departing. Both the low-key delivery and reaction suggested that the sentiments expressed were nothing out of the ordinary in the local Muslim community

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